

WE DON'T SEE THE WHOLE PICTURE

by Rabbi Yaakov Menken

"The Rock, his works are perfect, for all His ways are just; a faithful Almighty without blemish, straight and righteous is He." [32:4]

In order to believe in G-d, one must be willing to accept that we don't know the whole story. We see bad things happen to good people, and conversely, we see good things happen to bad people. Do we know why? No. And if we insist that all is as it appears to us, then there is no room in our world-view for a good and benevolent G-d.

The Chofetz Chaim offers the following parable, modified into story form:

Mr. Schwartz was a great and wealthy man. He had property, servants, all a man could ask for - but the joy of his life was his only son, David. His love of his young son was boundless. One day, his son fell ill - and it soon became clear that this was no minor flu. As David's condition worsened, his father took him from doctor to doctor, from hospital to hospital, in a desperate attempt to diagnose the problem.

Finally, a leading specialist discovered that David suffered from an intense allergy to red meat. They restored David to health, but the doctor gave Mr. Schwartz the strongest of warnings to never permit his child to eat beef, veal or anything heavier than chicken.

He was indeed very careful - until he was called out of town on business. He warned his servants repeatedly, but on the last day of his trip, one of the cooks foolishly left a steak sandwich on the table. David wandered in, smelled the meat, grabbed a piece and ran outside.

Of course, David immediately became sick once again, just as his father was returning; Mr. Schwartz discovered his son near death. They rushed to the hospital, with the father swearing to never again travel for business - so as to be able to personally supervise his son.

With great effort, the doctors were again able to save David's life. When he was able to return home, the father made a special meal of thanksgiving for all his relatives and friends. As they sat down to dinner, they saw that Mr. Schwartz had ordered a catered meal that surpassed even his ordinary standards. And of course, not serving meat would have been out of the question, and would have required all sorts of uncomfortable explanations.

Several guests, sitting near the entrance, heard something very surprising - and disturbing: the voice of David himself, crying loudly to be permitted into the dinner hall! They sat there amazed, not understanding the bizarre actions of the "cruel father" who would not permit his own son to enter, when after all it was his health they were celebrating...

So too, we often cannot understand why G-d runs the world as he does. All we can do is look at the miracles He performed for us, the Torah He gave us, and the Covenant He made with us - and realize that although we may not understand, "the Rock, His works are perfect... straight and righteous is He."

Because this year Parshas Ha'azinu is on Shabbos Shuvah, the "Shabbos of Repentance" between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, it would be appropriate to also reflect on our inability to judge the actions of other people, as well. The same concept applies - we simply don't know the whole situation, and what compels another person to behave as he or she does. As Yom Kippur approaches, we should try to understand the other person's situation, as difficult as that might be, and forgive all sins against us, both real and imagined. May we all be forgiven, and may we be sealed for life!

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